

PHL|HP Consulting Group

Building & Sustaining High Performing Organizations



A Message From Dr. Philip Levy, Founder & President

THE ART OF PERSUASION

Jay Conger states that persuasion is an art consisting of four essential elements:

1. Establishing credibility based on proven expertise and success and relationships.
2. Finding common ground by demonstrating the benefits of a plan to all stakeholders.
3. Providing vivid supporting evidence through stories, metaphors, and examples that bring the plan to life.
4. Connecting emotionally with teammates at all levels.

“Superman Is Not the Model for Today’s Leader”

For over 35 years, I have espoused a leadership model that I referred to as Participatory Management. While 35 years ago this was viewed as revolutionary because it was contrary to the then pervasive command and control, top down management approach where executives led by decree, today Participatory Management is widely accepted.

The key to a leader (different than a manager or an executive - - not all managers and executives are leaders, though the most successful are) successfully utilizing a participatory approach is the art of persuasion. Most leaders misunderstand persuasion and do not view it as an art; often they think of it as manipulation to achieve their goals and spend a great deal of time trying to convince others that their way is best. This could not be farther from the truth.

Participatory Management and persuasion are processes that require a confident, knowledgeable and wise leader who genuinely believes that the ideas, opinions, and feelings of colleagues are of great value and importance. He/she does not believe that s/he has all the answers, rather that they have a vision that they are willing to adjust based on the input of others. The goal is a shared vision with the shared objective to reach mutually beneficial solutions and strategies. To get there, the leader must be patient, willing to truly listen, and able to negotiate so that all good and viable ideas are incorporated into the ultimate plan.

The work force today is populated by at least three generations - Baby Boomers, their offspring, Generation X, and to some degree, the Millennials (Generation Y). All have very different perspectives based upon the way they were parented and the economic, social, and historical times in which they evolved. One similarity of the Late Boomers and Gen X and Y’ers is that they do not like to be told what to do unless they understand the ‘why’. They were raised to be free thinkers and to be valued for their ideas, sometimes to an extreme level, which may result in them having an unrealistic sense of self and a heightened need to be heard and appreciated.

Today, leaders must skillfully blend multi-generations, benefitting from the diversity, while avoiding power struggles and discord that have the potential to sabotage a company, its goals, and its leadership.

What is a leader to do? Whatever your style, you must be viewed as a good listener, a caring leader, one who is genuinely interested in the views of your team. While you remain the captain of the ship, the most successful leaders are experienced as compassionate and generous in their stewardship. Most work today gets accomplished through an interdependent, team-oriented approach - note the open-plan design of many companies today; this requires a leader who persuades, not dictates and whose team believes they have been instrumental and essential in arriving at shared solutions.

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To do so requires patience, as this is a process that must be consistent with the corporate culture and the behavior of all leaders within an organization. Most important is the establishment of trust through a willingness to compromise. Successful leaders are experienced as authentic, open-minded, flexible, and willing to incorporate diverse ideas in order to achieve the best solutions - not just their pre-determined solutions. The art of persuasion is NOT manipulation, it is an honest, extended process designed to extrapolate the BEST ideas for the ultimate success of the organization.

In my work as an executive, consultant, and mentor, I often see the brightest, most talented leaders experience great frustration. I hear ‘Why do I have to arrive at all the answers?’; ‘Why is it always my idea?’; ‘Why do I have to do the heavy lifting?’; ‘Why aren’t they keeping pace with me?’ WHY? First, often you ARE the most experienced and talented member of the team - that’s why YOU ARE THE LEADER!

But, the frustration is often due to leaders suffering from the Superman model of leadership. To be a truly effective leader, you need to share the spotlight, identify, train and nurture other leaders, and create an environment that encourages free thinking and risk taking in a safe space.

I became a manager for the first time at the age of 20; it was an amazing opportunity to be part of a totally new field and to be a pioneer. I wanted to be successful and to be part of something that was big and growing - I was working 24/7 and driving everyone around me to keep pace with me. What I quickly learned was that it was an isolating experience and that if the organization was to thrive, no one individual could drive that success. Superman is a bad model for leadership. Teams win; individual stars lose, and participatory management and the art of persuasion are the keys to sustainable organizational success.

- Phil

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